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PROGRAM News Watch

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SUBJECT Report From CIA on Manual Discovered in Nicaragua

LOU WATERS: The CIA's Inspector General is investigating the Agency's controversial manual designed to teach Contra rebels how to overthrow Nicaragua's government.

Today, Democrats in the House and the Senate Intelligence Committees say the Reagan Administration is holding up the results of those investigations to avoid embarrassing the President before the election.

Mary Tillotson joins us now from our Washington studios with a report.

Mary?

MARY TILLOTSON: Lou, about three weeks ago, after word of that CIA manual on terrorist techniques to be used by the Contra rebels in Nicaragua surfaced in press reports, President Reagan put out a statement saying he is opposed to the sort of political assassination recommended in the manual, and also ordering two investigations of how the manual got produced.

The CIA Inspector General's office has now completed its investigation and sent its findings to the White House Intelligence Oversight Board for further review.

But, Democratic members of both the House and Senate Intelligence Oversight Committees, like Vermont's Senator Patrick Leahy, say they are now convinced the Administration will sit on the investigation findings until after the election.

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SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: Obviously, they have two issues there that are in conflict.

You've either got one person acting on their own, doing things they're not supposed to be doing in Nicaragua, or you have people at headquarters agreeing to do things to violate both the congressional and presidential directives.

Either thing is totally unacceptable. Either one is going to be an embarrassment to the Administration. That's why they want to put it off.

TILLOTSON: Democrats like Senator Leahy do not expect to be able to ask CIA Director William Casey any direct questions about the manual until after the election. But, Casey has written them about the handbook. That was in this letter addressed to every member of the House and Senate Intelligence Oversight Committees and dated October 25th.

In the letter, Casey said that the purpose of the manual is to turn Contra rebels into propagandist combatants, soldiers who are persuasive in face-to-face communications.

But, the version of the manual that was edited and approved by some unnamed CIA officials here in Washington also suggest that perhaps when persuasion fails the Contras should try neutralizing their opponents. And some Democrats have suggested that neutralizing in this context could be construed to mean murder.

A CIA spokeswoman today refused to say how the agency defines neutralize, refused to say what agency officials approved the use of that word in the edited version of the manual, and refused any comment on the Casey letter.